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SUBJECT: TIP IS KEY TOPIC AT THESSALONIKI ANTI-ORGANIZED  
CRIME CONFERENCE

THIS IS A JOINT ATHENS-THESSALONIKI MESSAGE.

1. (U) SUMMARY: Law enforcement officials and prosecutors from the Balkan region, as well as reps from regional and international organizations met February 1-2 in Thessaloniki at a conference co-sponsored by the Embassy/Consulate and the Stability Pact to compare notes on fighting trafficking in persons, among other cross-border issues (septel reports on the conference in general). Presenters noted new trends in the phenomenon, including the rise of women traffickers and less violent methods used to deal with victims. The TIP workshop, in which USG briefers figured prominently, was a good demonstration of the progress made in fighting TIP on a regional basis, especially using the SECI Anti-Crime Center in Bucharest, but also indicated that communication among Balkan countries needed to improve. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) At a workshop during the February 1-2 conference in Thessaloniki on organized crime in the Balkans, co-sponsored by the Embassy/Consulate and the Stability Pact, law enforcement and other officials from the region discussed the phenomenon of trafficking in persons and alien smuggling. Other participants included reps from the OSCE, INTERPOL, EUROPOL, Stability Pact, the SECI Center and SEEPAG, and USG reps from Washington, Athens, Thessaloniki, Skopje, Tirana and Bucharest,

3. (U) Presenters noted the following TIP trends and related information:

-- Changing nature of TIP: Stavros Boufidis, head of a Greek victim assistance NGO and rapporteur for the conference's TIP/Alien Smuggling workshop, said that physical violence against TIP victims by their traffickers was less of a problem now than in the past. Traffickers have changed tack, cajoling their victims and making them feel more as accomplices than as victims, which complicates prosecution. He added that traffickers are now using more "legal" means, such as obtaining genuine tourist visas, to traffic their victims. Women traffickers, including some who themselves had been victims, are a growing phenomenon, noted Barbara Carlin, LEGAT in Skopje.

-- Role of NGOs: Nearly every presenter agreed with the central role NGOs can play in the TIP fight. Nick Garlick of EUROPOL's Crimes Against Persons Unit said that NGOs not only provide humanitarian assistance and counseling, but can help prepare victims emotionally to testify against their traffickers. Boufidis argued that a police-NGO MOU would be the best means to enable anti-TIP NGOs to more effectively screen and assist victims.

-- Witness Protection Programs: Garlick indicated that many trafficking victims are not good candidates for witness protection programs (usually because they refuse to relocate) and special programs need to be designed. Boufidis said these programs should also extend to those who help the victims (he later told poloff that he himself had been threatened by traffickers for the assistance he had provided to victims).

-- Convictions and Asset Seizure: Helga Konrad, OSCE's Special Rep on TIP, mentioned that, in general, promising prosecutions rarely end in convictions/sentences, and emphasized that traffickers need to serve time in jail to serve as a deterrent. It is not enough for there to be suspended sentences and/or fines. She and Charles Cunningham, Section Chief of FBI's Transnational Criminal Enterprise Section, also made a pitch for countries of the region to adopt and implement strong asset seizure laws to make certain traffickers go out of business.

-- Regional Cooperation: Reps from SECI, SEEPAG, EUROPOL and INTERPOL all gave presentations on the assistance their organizations can provide to help regional law enforcement officials and prosecutors fight human traffickers. In particular, SECI reps noted how their organization has been successful in mounting a number of cross-border anti-TIP operations that resulted in the arrest and prosecution of traffickers.

-- Greece's Role: Greek police major Tonia Andreakou, head of the anti-TIP unit, discussed how Greek TIP trends reflect

European trends, the new one month reflection period in Greece, and the 12 now-operational anti-TIP police units throughout Greece. She shared the difficulties police have in differentiating voluntary prostitutes from TIP victims. (Note: A challenge which might be eased by Boufidis' suggestion for more formal police-NGO cooperation. End Note.) Hercules Moskoff, Human Security Expert at Greece's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, described the working group with embassy officials the MFA recently implemented with IOM. He stated publicly, perhaps for the first time by a Greek government official: "Too often, trafficked women are treated as criminals, arrested and deported."

14. (U) COMMENT: This conference, which included a strong showing by the USG, was a good demonstration of the progress that has been made in evaluating TIP in a regional context. More cooperation is needed, however, for communication to improve: during the ensuing discussion, a Romanian border official related that he needed permission from his superiors just to call his Bulgarian counterpart across the border. Now that the general TIP problem has been adequately mapped, perhaps the next step in the process would be to host conferences on specific aspects of the phenomenon, such as prevention, victim identification, witness protection, repatriation or prosecution.  
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